CHAPTER 2

BASIC NEWSWRITING

What elements make a news story and how are they used to construct a story?

If you were to pose these questions to a group of reporters, it is probable that no two of them would give the same responses. However, all would most likely include in their answers a similar list of elements they consider necessary for a story to be newsworthy.

This chapter will include this "list" of sorts and other essentials that will help you be successful in writing the basic news story.

BASIC ELEMENTS OF A NEWS STORY

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Identify the basic elements of a news story.

For the purposes of this TRAMAN, we will use the following 10 categories as those covering the major elements of news:

- Immediacy
- Proximity
- Consequence
- Conflict
- Oddity
- Sex
- Emotion
- Prominence
- Suspense
- Progress

If any one of these elements is present, a story has news value, but many stories contain more than one element. Remember this latter fact as you study the material that follows because even though the 10 elements are used as the framework of this discussion, several of the examples given might just as well be discussed under different elements.

Remember, too, that this is just one possible classification; another textbook might have classified these elements in slightly different categories. Rather than memorizing a set of categories, your chief concern will be to develop your understanding of what constitutes an interesting news story.

IMMEDIACY

A story that has just happened is news; one that happened a few days ago is history. Immediacy is timeliness. Few events of major significance can stand up as news if they fail to meet the test of timeliness. There is no point in submitting a news release on a routine change of command that occurred four days ago; the event is not big enough to overcome the time lag. A newspaper looks foolish if it publishes a news story, and after reading it, a subscriber says, "I heard about that two days ago."

However, an event that occurred sometime ago may still be timely if it has just been revealed. Examples are a newly discovered diary of John Paul Jones or the disclosure of a startling scientific accomplishment that occurred months ago, but has just been declassified. In these cases, the immediacy element revolves around the fact that the news was revealed or disclosed today. An up-to-the-minute touch is provided by words such as "newly disclosed," "revealed," "divulged" or "announced today."

PROXIMITY

Readers are interested in what happens close to them. Proximity is the nearness of an event to the readers or listeners and how closely it touches their lives. People are interested mainly in themselves, their families, their ships or stations, their friends and their home towns. If Capt. Gunn relieves Capt. Stone as commanding officer of Naval Station Annapolis, it is news in the Annapolis, Baltimore and Washington areas and in the two officers' home towns. It is not news in Huntsville, Ala., where no one knows either captain or cares particularly who commands a naval station in Maryland. Improvement or progress stories are important in their degree of proximity.

The Navy's home town news program is based on this element. When Thomas Katt, Seaman Apprentice, USN, reports to USS *Pine,* it is news for his hometown

paper. Back home in Hialeah, Fla., he is not Navy Seaman Apprentice Thomas Katt. He is Mr. Michael Katt's son, Thomas, who used to help his father rebuild homes devastated by Hurricane Andrew. He is someone the readers know. The element of proximity is present to a high degree. Further information on home town news may be frond in Chapter 17.

CONSEQUENCE

News of change or news that affects human relations is news of consequence. The more people affected, the greater the news value. A story on the advancement of 1,500 petty officers has consequence within the Navy, especially to those who took the exams. A congressional act that raises the pay of everyone in the armed forces is of great consequence both to the Navy and to the public, which foots the bill and also benefits from the increased purchasing power of the serviceman or servicewoman.

CONFLICT

Sporting events, wars and revolutions are the most common examples of conflict in the news. Man maybe pitted against man, team against team, nation against nation or man against the natural elements. A story about a pilot struggling to land a crippled plane or a coxswain's heroic efforts to keep his crowded boat from swamping in heavy seas are other examples.

ODDITY

The unusual or strange will help lift a story out of the ordinary. If an ordinary pilot parachuted out of an ordinary plane with an ordinary parachute and makes an ordinary landing, there is no real news value. However, if the aviator has only one leg, this is news; or if the parachute fails to open and the pilot lands safely, this is news. A sailor named B. A. Sailor is a good angle. So is the helicopter that towed a ship, the man that bit his dog or the plane that landed even though the pilot had bailed out.

SEX

Sometimes sex is the biggest single element in news, or at least it appears to be the element that attracts readers the most. Consider all the stories in papers that involve men and women — sports, financial news, society and crime. Sex, in discussing news elements, covers far more than a Hollywood star's impending visit to your command. The element of sex ranges from front-page sensationalism to news involving engagements and marriages.

Stories and accompanying pictures of movie stars or other prominent celebrities visiting your ship or station can be loaded with sex. Nevertheless, any type of news that overemphasizes the "cheesecake" element is considered to be in poor taste for an official Navy release and is to be avoided.

EMOTION

The emotional element, sometimes called the human interest element, covers all the feelings that human beings have, including happiness, sadness, anger, sympathy, ambition, hate, love, envy, generosity and humor. Emotion is comedy; emotion is tragedy; it is the interest man has in mankind. A good human interest story can range from a real "tearjerker" to a rollicking farce.

PROMINENCE

Prominence is a one-word way of saying "names make news." When a person is prominent, like the President of the United States, almost anything he does is newsworthy — even his church attendance. Several hundred civilians may visit your ship or station in the course of a month without raising a stir. Yet, if one happens to be the governor of the state, you have a news story packed with prominence. Prominence is not restricted or reserved for VIPS only. Some places, things and events have prominence. For example, the White House (a place), the Hope Diamond (a thing) and Christmas (an event) all awaken interest.

SUSPENSE

You most often see the suspense element in a day-by-day or hour-by-hour account of a desperate search for a lost submarine, in a story of rescue operations in a mine where workers are trapped or in the efforts made to rescue a Navy diver trapped in the wreckage of a sunken ship. A news story does not build to a climax as a mystery does. Still, putting the most important facts first does not destroy the suspense of many stories because the ultimate outcome is unknown and is usually revealed in progressive, periodic installments.

PROGRESS

In our technologically advanced society, we are interested in space exploration. Therefore,

developments of more powerful and advanced rockets to propel manned space flights are of great interest to most Americans.

Progress does not have to be dramatic. For example, an improvement in mooring lines, shoe leather or paper clips can be significant progress. There is a great deal of progress in Navy news stories. The Navy is constantly making progress in seamanship, weapons systems, aeronautics, nuclear propulsion, medicine, habitability, education, human relations, leadership and other fields.

IDENTIFICATION OF DOMINANT NEWS ELEMENTS

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Distinguish the dominant news elements in basic news stories.

Just how are these key elements applied in judging the newsworthiness of an event? .

First of all, the newsworthiness of a story depends on the strength or intensity of the news elements it contains — the more intense the elements, the more newsworthy the story.

After gathering material for a news story, you normally find that one or more elements overshadow the others in intensity. These are the **dominant elements.** This is sometimes referred to as the **news peg.**

NEWS PEG

A news peg is the most significant or interesting fact in a story. It is featured in the first paragraph, and all other facts revolve around it. In other words, it is a foundation around which you construct the facts of your story.

For just a few moments, put yourself in this hypothetical situation and assume that you are a JO assigned to the Public Affairs Office, NAS Moffett Field, Calif. The facts of the story, for which you have been given the task of readying for a 1400 release to the local media, are as follows:

1. Navy Lt. Humberto K. Libute, son of Mr. and Mrs. Perfecto F. Libute of 2714 Caspian St., Long Beach, Calif., is a pilot attached to Fighter Squadron 24 at NAS Miramar.

2. At 9 am. (always use civilian terminology for civilian media), Lt. Libute took off from the naval air station in a supersonic F-14 'Tomcat" for gunnery practice over the Mojave Desert.

3. At 9:20 a.m., while flying at an altitude of 13,000 feet, Lt. Libute put his plane into a shallow dive and fired a few bursts from his cannon. When he pulled out of the dive a few seconds later, hydraulic warning lights lighted up like a Christmas tree.

4. Lt. Libute fought desperately to control his damaged plane, but had to bail out.

5. Amazingly the Tomcat landed in the desert. The plane's wings sheared off causing considerable damage, but the pilot escaped serious injury. He walked away from the crash, but collapsed from shock and loss of blood.

6. After an emergency blood transfusion and treatment for shock, Lt. Libute is recovering at the NAS hospital. Doctors report that his condition is good.

7. A preliminary investigation into the cause of the accident revealed that Lt. Libute's jet had lost hydraulic pressure.

Now that we know the facts in the story, let us see if we can determine the most dominant elements. Figure 2-1 will help you analyze them. Elements have been classified in degrees of **very strong, strong, weak, very weak** and **none.**

As you can see, the elements of immediacy, proximity and oddity are listed as strong. They are dominant elements in this story, with oddity taking a decided edge over the other two. They will be combined in the news peg, which will be featured in the beginning of the story. The news peg for this story could be written as follows:

"A Navy plane was shot down by its own gunfire near San Jose today. The plane, piloted by Lt. Humberto K.Libute..."

As the story is developed, the other facts are introduced to complement or supplement the dominant elements featured in the news peg.

Figure 2-2 lists a few other examples of analyzing dominant elements for the news peg. The first element listed is the strongest. The others, if there are any, are supporting elements.

Note that immediacy and proximity are not listed as dominant elements, unless they actually overshadow the other elements. Immediacy is present in practically every story because the facts must be **new** to be considered news. Proximity also is present impractically every local story.

News Element	Degree of Intensity	Justification
Immediacy	Strong	Accident occurred this morning. Story will be released this afternoon.
Proximity	Strong	Accident occurred locally. Squadron and pilot are attached locally.
Consequence	Weak	Measures will undoubtedly be taken to prevent further recurrence of this type, but this one incident in itself does not affect a great number of people.
Conflict	Weak	The pilot's struggle for survival is worth mentioning, but more details are necessary to make this element strong.
Oddity	Very Strong	Nothing like this has been recorded before.
Sex	None	----------
Emotion	Very Weak	The reader will sympathize with the pilot, but not beyond the extent one human being sympathizes for another human being in an unfortunate situation.
Prominence	None	The pilot is not widely known.
Suspense	Weak	Although the facts, as presented here, do not lend themselves to suspended interest, the story has a certain amount of drama and suspense.
Progress	Weak	Progress in aviation may eventually result from this situation, but there is nothing in the facts that will improve mankind's health, comfort or happiness.

Figure 2-1.—Analyzing news elements.

SPOT AND CREATED NEWS

Most Navy news (and all other news as well) can be classified as either **spot news** or **created news.**

Spot news just happens. A ship runs aground. A plane crashes. A heroic rescue takes place in a storm-tossed sea. These are just a few examples. Your job is to provide a full account of a spot news story as soon as possible — even in cases where the general effect is unfavorable to the Navy.

Created news is generally concerned with something the Navy has done or plans to do which the public should know about. Examples include air shows, command public visitation, change of command, unveiling new ships, planes or weapons, construction programs, special achievements, ship arrivals and many of the other daily events of Navy life. Your job is to bring the information to the attention of news media, usually through a Navy news release.

CLASSES OF NEWS STORIES

Most Navy news stories fall into four main categories—hard news, feature, sports and social. They are described in the following text.

Hard News

The hard news story is designed primarily to inform. It usually concerns a news item involving or affecting the readers, listeners or viewers. The hard news story has usually taken place since a previous issue of a newspaper or a radio or television newscast. Much of the material found in daily papers (especially front-page items) or newscasts are in the hard news category.

News Item	Dominant Element
Today is the final day for filing your annual income tax return.	Immediacy Consequence
A Navy flier, who braved enemy ground fire to locate a downed fellow airman over hostile territory, has been posthumously presented the Navy Cross.	Emotion
The Administration is near a final decision — perhaps it will come next week — on how much of a pay raise it will seek for the armed forces.	Consequence
The President of the United States submitted the names of 50 flag rank selectees to the senate for confirmation, including the name of Capt. Alene B. Druek. Capt. Druek, a Nurse Corps selectee, will be the Navy's first woman flag officer.	Prominence Sex
Seaman Floyd M. Pirtle, son of Mr. and Mrs. Floyd Pirtle of Route 2, Fayetteville, Tenn., is currently patrolling the Western Pacific with the Seventh Fleet aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Kitty Hawk*.	Proximity (in the Fayetteville area)
A Navy officer, who had never taken control of an aircraft, brought an Air Force spotter plane in for a rough but successful landing recently. The incident came about after the pilot was killed by ground fire during a routine observation mission over enemy territory.	Oddity Suspense
More new weapons systems than before, an improved retention rate, better housing, and an increase in minority recruiting were some of the accomplishments that John H. Chafee was proud to list from his 3 1/2 years as Secretary of the Navy.	Progress Prominence
Navy sank Delaware, 24-3 today in the first ever Blue Crab Bowl at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium.	Conflict
The first female seaman qualified today as a deep sea diver at the Navy Diving and Salvage School.	Sex Oddity

Figure 2-2.—Identifying dominant news elements.

Feature News

The feature news story is about an event or situation that stirs the emotions or imagination. The event mayor may not have taken place, or the situation may or may not have arisen since the last issue of a periodical or delivery of a newscast. The feature story is designed primarily to entertain, but it also serves to create interest or to inform the reader. It may be about such subjects as a sailor with the unusual hobby of collecting 18th-century etchings, a command that has adopted a stray goat as a mascot, a Navy cook who worked in a leading French restaurant before enlisting or, in a serious vein, the plight of a child who has been orphaned by an automobile accident.

Sports News

The sports news story may be handled as either hard news or a feature. These stories chronicle the activities accomplishments of sports figures. In most cases of Navy sports, unless teams are prominent (such as that of the U.S. Naval Academy), the material is aimed at ship and station publications.

Social News

The social story, which may also be handled as either hard news or as a feature, primarily concerns wives; daughters and family activities. Most often Navy social stories deal with the activities of officers and enlisted wives' clubs, the happenings of the teen-age set, weddings and local charity events.

Other Categories

Other categories of stories frequently used in metropolitan newspapers include interpretive, science, consumer and financial.

INTERPRETIVE.— In an interpretive story, the reporter attempts to give an in-depth analysis and survey of the causes or possible consequences of important news events.

SCIENCE.— With this story, the reporter attempts to explain, in layman's language, scientific and technological news.

CONSUMER.— The writer of a consumer story attempts to help his audience buy more wisely, maintain products and homes better, cook or garden better, and so forth.

FINANCIAL.— Writers of financial news focus on business, commercial or investment stories.

Writers of these stories are usually expected to have an academic background or experience in their subject matter, as well as the ability to observe and write well.

NEWS STYLE VS. LITERARY ENGLISH

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Recognize the differences between the news and literary English writing styles; identify the ABCs of journalism.

Many great writers have been known for their dramatic styles, vivid descriptions and the eloquent conversation of their characters. It is obvious, however, that these great writers were not concerned with news style writing or the fundamentals of newswriting. Consider the following quotation for example:

> "It is a thing well known to both American and English whaleships, and as well . a thing placed upon authoritative record years ago by Scoresby, that some whales have been captured far north in the Pacific, in whose bodies have been found the barbs of harpoons darted in the Greenland seas. Nor is it to be gainsaid, that in some of these instances two assaults could not have exceeded very many days. Hence, the inference, it has been believed by some whalemen, that the North West Passage, so long a problem to men, was never a problem to the whale."

Perhaps this quotation is famtiliar to you. It is from *Moby Dick*, which is one of the greatest sea stories ever written. It was published more than 100 years ago and is still read today. Its author, Herman Melville, was known for his moving literary style.

A modern journalist writing this piece for a newspaper might put it on paper as follows:

> "The Northwest Passage, long sought by man, maybe known and used by whales.
>
> "American and British sailors have reported finding the barbs of harpoons from Greenland in the bodies of whales killed in the North Pacific. In some cases, the wounds were only a few days old. This has led some whalers to believe that whales must use some shortcut from the North Atlantic to the North Pacific."

The preceding contrast shows the difference between literary writing of more than 100 years ago and newspaper English today.

Media writing is geared to the public, not the professor. The purpose is to inform, not to impress. All the frills are stripped away. Unnecessary wording costs the media money in terms of time (electronic) or space (print).

Newspapers are read in a hurry. They are read at breakfast, on the subway, against the blare of radio or television, or over someone's shoulder. Many readers scan the headlines and read only the opening paragraphs of a few articles. These readers have neither the time nor the desire to wade through literary writing. Many may have limited educations. Surveys show that the average newspaper reader has the reading ability of a 12-year-old child.

Does this mean that you have to write for 12-year-olds? No, it does not. We are not speaking of the readers' ability to grasp ideas, but rather of their ability to understand difficult words. There is a great difference. For example, consider the following paragraph:

> Gravitation is omnipresent; it is exerted by every body on every other body, no matter how remote or minute. Between two given objects, its force varies directly with the product of the two masses and inversely with the squares of the distance between their centers. Exerting itself throughout the

> universe, it is gravitation that keeps the cosmos in equilibrium.

This paragraph is obviously too difficult for an adult with a 12-year-old reading level. Yet the adult mind could grasp the idea involved if we translate the paragraph into simple English such as follows:

> All bodies attract each other. This is true no matter how small or far apart they may be. The heavier two objects are, the more they pull on each other. The farther apart they are, the weaker this force becomes. In measuring the pull, distance is particularly important, for if you double the distance, the force is cut to one-fourth of its former strength. This force is called gravitation. Because of it, the earth, sun, moon and stars all pull against each other. The forces balance, and everything stays in its proper place.

Almost any idea, no matter how complicated, can be expressed in simple language. As a Navy journalist, you may have to explain some fairly technical ideas to readers who are not familiar with military life. You will have to do it in language they will understand. It is up to you to do the work of simplification, **not your readers.** If they find your writing is over their heads, they will skip your piece and goon to something that is easier to read. If this happens, you are not doing your job.

Also remember — the story you write for the general news media will probably be read by someone with a Ph.D. How do you satisfy both? A good writer can present the information so that the less educated can understand and so that the more intelligent will not become bored.

THE ABCs OF JOURNALISM

Some principles of newswriting you must apply every time you attempt to put words on paper include accuracy, brevity, clarity, coherence, emphasis, objectivity and unity.

ACCURACY

If a writer has to pick one principle that should never be violated, this should be the one. To fall down in this area is to discredit your entire writing effort. As a JO, you will be working with facts. These facts will involve persons, places and things. They will involve names, ages, titles, rank or ratings, addresses and descriptions. You will work with facts that are both familiar and unfamiliar to you.

You cannot afford to be casual in your approach to facts. Your readers will often judge the Navy on what you say and how you say it. An easy way to lose the public's respect and cofidence is by being careless in your handling of facts. When you send a story to a newspaper, the editor depends on you for accuracy in every fact.

The Navy news release heading that appears on every story you distribute means the information it contains is reliable and has been approved officially by the Navy. A mistake in a news story implies that the Navy is careless and undependable. Datelines tell when and where the story is written and should appear on all stories written for release. In the text of the story, when and where may refer to the dateline.

Attribution relates to accuracy. It means that you name the person who makes any statement that may be challenged. Good quotations liven a story, give it color and aid in development of coherence. Attribution also ensures that the reader does not get the impression the statement is the writer's personal opinion. However, attribution should never be used in a story merely to flatter a person by publicizing his or her name.

BREVITY

The question is often asked, "Should I be brief in my writing or complete?" By all means, be brief, but not at the expense of completeness. The key is to boil down your writing and eliminate garbage. A compact piece of writing is frequently much stronger than a lengthy story. An example is Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. This speech has outlived a flock of long harangues by later statesmen. One of the reasons for its survival is its brevity.

CLARITY

Nothing is more discouraging than reading an article and then realizing that you do not know what you read. A similar frustration arises when you are trying to follow directions on assembling a toy, particularly when the instructions read, "...even a 5-year-old can assemble this toy," and you cannot do it, because the directions read as if they were written in a foreign language. Assume that if there is any chance of misunderstanding, readers will misunderstand. Reread what you have written looking for points that could lead to readers' misunderstanding.

COHERENCE

An article that skips illogically from topic to topic and back again in a jumbled, befuddled manner lacks coherence. Coherence means sticking together, and that is what stories and articles should do. Facts should follow facts in some kind of reasonable order. It may be logical order, chronological order, place order or order of importance, depending on the subject, but order of one kind or another is vital. Outlining will often help.

EMPHASIS

Make sure your writing emphasizes what you want it to. You assure this in newswriting by putting the most important fact first (the lead, discussed later). There are other types of arrangements for emphasis that are used in feature stories or in.editorials. More information will be presented on this later in this chapter.

OBJECTIVITY

To report news accurately, you must keep yourself detached from the happenings and present an impersonal, unbiased, unprejudiced story. This is why you never see a good reporter at an accident running around saying, "Isn't this horrible? I feel so sorry for the family. Why, just the other day I was talking to ol' Jed, and now he is dead." These may very well be your feelings, but you must attempt to keep aloof in order to give an objective report. It is not your job to influence people directly, but rather to tell them what is going on. You direct their thinking only to the limited extent that you make them think for themselves by an unbiased presentation of the facts.

UNITY

A news story should deal with one basic topic. There may be many facts and ins and outs to the story, but it is still one story. If you set out to write a story on the services and activities available at the enlisted club, and end up with a biography of the club manager, the story lacks unity. The simple solution frequently is to write two stories, rather than trying to combine a mass of information into one.

THE LANGUAGE OF NEWSWRITING

Written language is made up of three elements — **words, sentences** and **paragraphs.** It. is the way these elements are handled that makes the difference between literary and news English. Briefly, let us look at these elements separately.

Words

Words are your basic tools. Like any skilled technician, you should be able to select the best tools to do the best job. This means you should use words that say exactly what you mean so they can be understood by others.

Every word used in a news story should add to the picture you are building in the minds of your readers. If you use an unnecessary, vague or unfamiliar word, this picture becomes blurred. If it becomes too blurred, it may give the reader a distorted picture of the facts. This is a form of inaccuracy that is just as bad as putting the wrong facts down on paper.

It is an axiom of newswriting that words that do not work for you, work against you. Here are a few tips on making words work for you.

AVOID GOBBLEDYGOOK.— Gobbledygook is confusing writing, often marked by pseudotechnical language that readers cannot understand. In writing a technical story, do not parrot the words some technical-minded researcher pours out. **Simplify.** Ask, "What does this mean in everyday English?" Few people, for example, know what "arteriosclerosis" means. But when you say "hardening of the arteries," they immediately understand.

AVOID WORDINESS.— Many nexperienced writers put unnecessary words into their news copy. Call a spade a spade, not "a long-handled agricultural implement utilized for the purpose of dislodging the earth's crust."

Short, common words are easy to understand when, in many cases, long words are not. If you must use a longer word, make sure you are using it to convey a special meaning, not just for the sake of using a big word. Why use **contribute** if **give** means the same thing? This also applies to **veracity** for **truth, monumental** for **big, apprehension** for **fear, canine** for **dog** and countless others. Practically every part of speech contains long words that may be replaced by shorter and more exact ones. The same principle applies to phrases. Why say "afforded an opportunity" when "flowed" is more exact, or why use "due to the fact that" instead of "because"?

BE SPECIFIC.— Inexactness is just as bad as wordiness. Readers want to know specific facts. Consider the following example of this:

Vague: Thousands of fans were turned away that afternoon.

Specific: Three thousand fans were turned away before game time.

AVOID TRITE OR HACKNEYED EXPRESSIONS.— These are the mark of either an amateur or a lazy writer. Some particularly bad examples include the following:

- Cheap as dirt
- Smart as a whip
- Fat as a pig
- Nipped in the bud
- Good as gold
- Blushing bride
- Grim reaper
- Wee hours
- Ripe old age
- Picture of health
- Crystal clear
- Quick as lightning
- Bouncing baby boy/girl

USE STRONG, ACTIVE VERBS.— Whenever possible, use active voice and the simple past tense. The use of these injects life, action and movement into your news stories. In using strong verbs, you will find some of the tendency for you to rely on adverbs to do the work is eliminated. In newswriting, adverbs often do nothing more than clutter writing. Consider the following example:

Weak (passive voice): The visitors were warmly received by Capt. Smith in his office.

Stronger (active voice): Capt. Smith greeted the visitors in his office.

AVOID MILITARY JARGON.— For those in the Navy, the phrase "general quarters" is clear enough. Yet for others, the phrase may mean nothing; to some, it may seem to mean the area where the general is housed. When you assume that all your readers know general quarters means the command to man battle stations for crew members aboard ship, you make a false assumption. You do not impress your readers by using words and phrases they do not understand; you only imitate them.

For example, an unidentified Navy official issued a statement explaining that the purpose of an overtime policy was "...to accommodate needs for overtime . which are identified as a result of the initiation of the procedures contained herein during the period of time necessary to institute alternative procedures to meet the identified need."

In some situations, it is appropriate to use common military phrases, such as "fleet training exercise," "ship's galley" and "weapons system."

WATCH SPELLING AND GRAMMAR.— A JO, or a person interested in becoming a Navy journalist, should have better than average spelling ability. This person should also have a good command of the English language as far as correct grammar is concerned. Therefore, no extensive lesson is given in this area of study, although some basics are presented in Chapter 6.

One goal of every good writer is not to learn to spell perfectly, but to learn to spell well enough so that a mistake can be spotted when words are put on paper. When in doubt, use the dictionary. Dictionaries are standard stock items in the Navy, and every public affairs office should have one. (For style, usage and spelling questions not covered in *The Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual,* use *Webster's New World Dictionary of the American Language, Third College Edition.)* Additionally, keep in mind that virtually all word processing software packages contain a spell check feature that you should use at every opportunity.

USE A STYLEBOOK.— In newswriting, the word style refers to the spelling, punctuation, capitalization, abbreviation and similar mechanical aspects of grammar used in preparing copy (a term used to describe all news manuscripts). Most newspapers and other periodicals have their own style sheets or local interpretations of style rules. The important thing for you to remember about style is **consistency.**

The recommended guide for preparing military news is The *Associated Press Stylebook and Libel Manual.* However, any locally prepared style guide or style sheet is fine as long as it is internally consistent and is suitable for your purpose. For further information on stylebooks, consult Chapter 7 (Newspaper Staff Supervision) of the JO l &C TRAMAN.

Sentences

The second element of language is the sentence. The simple declarative sentence that consists of subject and verb, or subject, verb and object is the most common form in normal, informal conversation. For this reason, it is the best sentence structure for most newswriting. Notice how the following sentence becomes more readable and understandable when it is rewritten in two simple sentences:

> **Sentence:** Following his graduation from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1948, Brown was assigned to the destroyer USS *Roulston,* where he served his first tour of sea duty for three years as assistant communications officer and junior watch officer.
>
> **Rewrite:** Brown was graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1948. He spent his first tour of sea duty aboard the destroyer USS *Roulston as* assistant communications officer and junior watch officer.

Simplifying sentences is not difficult, but it does take a little practice. In time, you can learn to use just the right number of words to achieve maximum clarity without destroying smoothness.

There are no absolute rules, but a fair guide is to try to keep sentences to 30 words or less and to shoot for 17 to 20. Vary the length of your sentences. For example, you might use a four-word sentence, then a 15-word sentence, then an eight-word sentence, followed by a 30-word sentence. This keeps your writing from becoming singsong.

DO NOT CLUTTER.— Never crowd too many details into one sentence. Although a compound or complex sentence may contain more than one thought, you should, for the most part, stick to sentences that express one thought clearly and concisely. Otherwise, the reader is apt to get lost in a mass of clauses and details.

DO NOT REPEAT.— If you say in the lead of your story that 61 people were killed in a training accident, do not mention later in the story that 61 were killed. If the readers forget a fact, they can look back. Newspaper space is valuable; do not waste it with redundancy. Refrain from beginning a sentence with the same word as the last word in the previous sentence and avoid beginning consecutive sentences alike, unless you do it deliberately for emphasis.

Paragraphs

The most general guideline for writing paragraphs is that they should be kept reasonably short. When ou use short paragraphs, you give the reader facts and ideas in smaller packages that are easier to handle. The mind can grasp a small unit of thought more easily than a large unit. Also, most news copy is set in narrow columns with only three to five words per line. This makes paragraphs of normal literary length appear as extremely long, unrelieved gray blocks of body type (more detail on typography, the appearance and arrangement of printed matter is contained in Chapter 8). These large gray blocks of type are monotonous to the reader's eye and difficult to read.

Paragraphs should be less than 60 words. Two or three sentences per paragraph are just about right, but it is perfectly acceptable to have a one-sentence paragraph, or even a one-word paragraph, if it expresses a complete thought.

Yet, a succession of very short paragraphs may give a choppy effect to the writing. For best effect, alternate paragraphs of short and medium length. Never begin succeeding paragraphs with the same words or phrases. This, too, can cause a monotonous effect that will soon discourage the reader.

THE STRAIGHT NEWS STORY

LEARNING OBJECTIVE: Outline the various parts of the straight news story.

The major difference in style between newswriting English and literary English was discussed earlier in this chapter. There is also a big difference in structure between the literary piece and a newspaper story.

Journalism and architecture have more in common than what is evident at first glance. While the designing and planning of a building is far more complicated than the construction of a news story, both are the same in principle. In each case, space is a prime element.

An architect uses bricks, cement and other materials; a newswriter uses words as his bricks and cement. If the building lacks design and careful construction, it will collapse; if the news story is not carefully planned, it will only serve to confuse the reader and discredit the publication in which it appears.

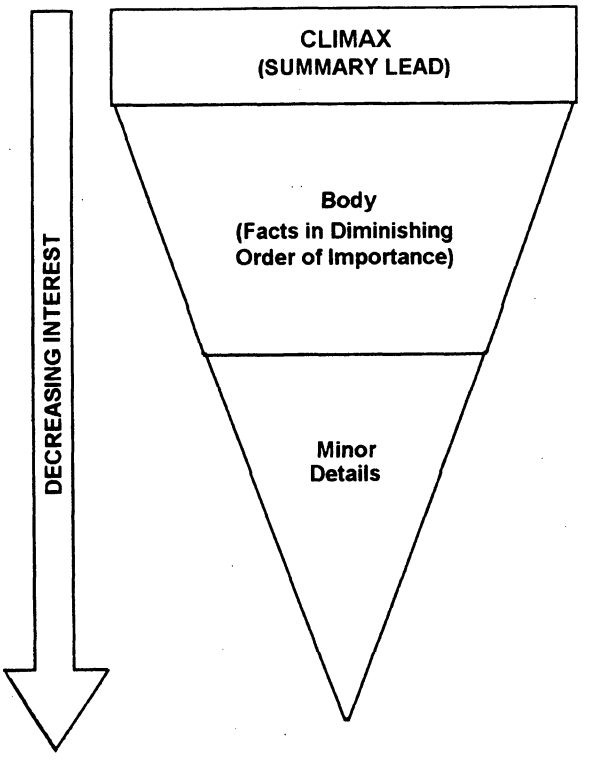

Figure 2-3.—Inverted pyramid news story structure.

Before you can present the facts, you first must understand them, appraise them correctly and organize them in an orderly and easily understood manner. This process of organization and selection begins when you set out on an assignment. You rarely will be able to-get your facts in the order in which they will appear in the final story. The process of legible note-taking provides the raw material for you to construct the story, and certain proven guidelines serve as the blueprint for building the final product.

In fiction, a short story or novel is normally constructed in chronological order. This means the author starts from the beginning, sets the time and place, describes the scene, introduces his characters, then slowly weaves the threads of his plots and subplots until a climax is reached, usually near the end of the story. The writer deliberately holds back the climax to build suspense and to make sure the reader reads the entire story.

Most news stories, however, are constructed in just the opposite fashion. **The climax is presented first.** This method packs the most important facts together with the barest necessary explanatory material into the first paragraph (the summary lead), then moves into the detailed portion of the story (the body) by covering the facts in diminishing order of importance. This form of newswriting is commonly known as the inverted pyramid style because when it is diagramed, it appears as an upside-down pyramid (fig. 2-3).

ADVANTAGES OF THE INVERTED PYRAMID STYLE

The inverted pyramid style offers several distinct advantages in newswriting, which are discussed in the following text.

Presents Pertinent Facts First

Most readers have neither the time nor the desire to read every word of every story in a newspaper. By using the summary lead, the JO focuses the reader's attention on the news, arouses the reader's interest and allows the reader to swiftly skim important facts. In other words, spill the whole story in the first paragraph. The reader can decide whether to continue reading the details or to go on to something else. But even if the reader stops there, the inverted pyramid form of writing has provided the essential facts. The primary objective of a news story then, is not to withhold information, but to present the facts with rapid, simple directness.

Facilitates Page Layout

The inverted pyramid method of story construction is a valuable tool to the makeup person who is confronted with an eight-inch story and only six inches of column space. If the story has been written in inverted pyramid form, it becomes a simple matter of cutting lines of type from the bottom of the story until it fits the available space or "jumping" (continuing) the story on anothe page — all without damage to the important facts that appear at the top.

Facilitates Headline Writing

Headlines for news stories should tell the main facts in the most brief form. If a story is written in the proper inverted pyramid style, the copyreader (who writes the headline) can find these facts in the first paragraph. The copyreader will not have to search the entire story for headline material.

THE LEAD

The opening paragraph of a news story is referred to as the **lead** (pronounced "leed").

Element	Example
Who	A smoke jumper extinguished a blaze and prevented a forest fire in Gallatin National Forrest, Wyo., yesterday by diverting a mountain waterfall over a burning tree. **Note:** This is an impersonal "who" lead. The "who" can be identified in general terms when the individual or group is not well known by name, such as "three Navy admirals," "a former secretary of the Navy" or "three Navy seamen." When the impersonal "who" lead is used, the actual name or names should be mentioned further down in the story.
What	A burning tree didn't become a forest fire in Gallatin National Forest, Wyo., yesterday because a smoke jumper diverted a small mountain waterfall.
When	Yesterday a smoke jumper prevented a forest fire in Gallatin National Forest, Wyo., when he diverted a small mountain waterfall over a blazing tree.
Where	In Gallatin National Forest, Wyo., a smoke jumper yesterday prevented a forest fire by diverting a small mountain waterfall over a burning tree.
Why	To prevent a forest fire in Gallatin National Forest, Wyo., a smoke jumper yesterday diverted a small mountain waterfall over a blazing tree.
How	By diverting a small mountain waterfall over a blazing tree in Gallatin National Forest, Wyo., yesterday, a smoke jumper prevented a forest fire.

Figure 2-4.—Example lead variations.

Story Category	Summary Lead	
Hometowner	WHO	AT SEA ABOARD USS *KITTY HAWK* — Seaman John L. Slayton, USN, son of Mr. and Mrs. Robert K. Slayton of Route 3, Fayetteville, Tenn.,
	WHAT	reported for duty
	WHEN	July 25
	WHERE	aboard the aircraft carrier USS *Kitty Hawk.*
Award Presentation	WHO	AGANA, GUAM — A Navy petty officer
	WHAT	was awarded the Navy Achievement Medal
	WHERE	here
	WHEN	today
	WHY	for saving the life of a 5-year-old girl
	HOW	by rescuing her from the shark-infested waters of Telefofo Bay.
Accident Story	WHO	NORFOLK, VA., Jan. 7 — A Navy seaman
	WHAT	was killed
	WHEN	today
	WHY	when his car collided with a bus
	WHERE	near Wards Corner on Granby Street.
Change of Command Story	WHO	SAN DIEGO — Capt. Winston P. Gregory, USN,
	WHAT	took command of the submarine tender USS *McKee* (AS 41)
	WHEN	today
	WHERE	in shipboard ceremonies here at North Island.
Convention Story	WHO	NAS ALAMEDA, CALIF. — Forty-five members of the surviving 55 famed Doolittle Raiders
	WHERE	were present here
	WHEN	this week
	WHAT	for a three-day program which commemorated the 50th anniversary of the first American bombing raid of Japan.

Figure 2-5.—Example summary leads by story catergory.

Dominant Fact		Lead Example
WHEN:	Sometimes the time element plays an important part in the story.	With only five seconds left to play, Navy scored the winning touchdown to defeat Army, 36-30 in the annual football classic this afternoon at Philadelphia.
WHERE:	If the setting of your story is unusual or especially important, play it up at the beginning.	Three hundred miles above the earth's atmosphere, two Navy astronauts are orbiting the earth in a spacecraft at speeds more than 50,000 mph.
WHAT:	When a thing or action in a story is noteworthy and overshadows the other facts, it, too, should be featured in the beginning.	Bowling two consecutive 300 games was the unprecedented accomplishment of Dick Hitchens, USN, a crew member of the submarine tender USS *Milano*.
WHY:	The motive, cause or reason may also be an important feature of the lead.	Because he was raised in an orphanage himself, a veteran Navy combat pilot is attempting to adopt two Italian children whose parents were killed in an automobile accident.
HOW:	The circumstances or the manner in which something is accomplished in a news story is often important.	By hurling a 20mm shell magazine from the destroyer USS *Homeboy* yesterday, a Navy gunner's mate prevented severe damage to his ship and possibly saved the lives of several crew members.

Figure 2-6.—Sample summary leads featuring the most important elements.

The lead is the first and most important paragraph of any news story. It attracts the reader and-states the important facts first.

A key fundamental fact taught in classrooms the first time newswriting is mentioned, and repeated at the college level, is that in writing a lead for a straight news story, the writer must answer six basic questions about the event. Known as the five Ws and H questions, they are as follows: **who, what, where, when, why** and **how.**

It is not necessary that a writer answer all of these questions in the lead sentence. The summary lead does, however, attempt to answer several of the more important ones. To insist upon answering the five Ws and H questions as a rigid format will lead to lengthy, cumbersome leads that may be misleading or hard to read. The lead contains the news peg and is the most important part of the story. It can either make or break any news story.

Length

Try not to use more than 30 words in the lead, but do not make this an inviolable rule. Some leads, even when well written, may require 35 or even 40 words. On the other hand, many — or perhaps most — require fewer than 30 words to accomplish their objective.

A good lead maybe a single word, a single sentence, two sentences, a paragraph or even two paragraphs. Whatever form it takes, it must answer the questions a reader would normally ask such as the following: **"What** has happened or is about to happen?" **"Who** is involved?" **"When** and **where** did it happen?" And, sometimes, **"how** and **why** did it happen?" An effective lead directs the reader's interest into the body of the story.

The summary news lead is the one most often used at the beginning of a straight news story. The most direct approach (and best method for an inexperienced writer to use in constructing a summary lead) is known simply as featuring the most important element. Featuring the most important element means exactly what it says. The writer determines which of the five Ws and H is most important to the story and places it at the outset of the lead. Each of the example leads in figure 2-4 features a different W or H as the most important element.

The leads in the figure are given to show how any element may be featured. The "why" element (to prevent a forest fire in this case) is clearly understood and can be dropped out of most leads to avoid redundancy and extra wording. Other summary lead examples are presented in figure 2-5 that answers all or most of the necessary five Ws or H. Those omitted are either implied or unnecessary.

The five summary lead examples in figure 2-5 are all "who" leads. In each example, who is featured at the beginning of the lead, thus giving it more prominence than the other Ws or H. More examples of summary leads are illustrated in figure 2-6, with a different W, or H, featured at the beginning of each.

Type of Novelty Lead		Example
CONTRAST:	The contrast lead compares two opposite extremes, generally to dramatize a story. The comparisons most frequently used are tragedy with comedy, age with youth, the past with the present and the beautiful with the ugly.	In 1914, the United States entered the First World War with a Navy of 4,376 officers, 69,680 men, 54 airplanes, one airship, three balloons and one air station. Today, there are more than 500,000 active-duty officers and enlisted personnel, 475 ships and 8,260 aircraft in our Navy.
PICTURE:	The picture lead draws a vivid word picture of the person or thing in the story. It allows the reader to see the person or thing as you saw it.	Thin and unshaven, his clothes drooping from his body like rags on a scarecrow, Lt. Frank Brown, USN, today told naval authorities about his six-week ordeal in an open rubber boat in the South China Sea.
FREAK:	The freak lead is the most novel of the novelty leads. As the name implies, the freak lead employs a play on words, alliteration, poetry or an unusual typographical arrangement to introduce the facts in the story and to attract the reader's attention.	For sale: One guided missile destroyer. The Navy is thinking about inserting this advertisement. ... $ammy $mith, who i$ ju$t $even, wa$ digging in the $and at amon$ Beach today and gue$$ what he found?
BACKGROUND:	The background lead is similar to a picture lead, except for one important difference. It draws a vivid word picture of the news setting, surroundings or circumstances.	High seas, strong winds and heavy overcast provided the setting for a dramatic mission of mercy in the North Atlantic on the first day of the new year.
PUNCH:	The punch lead consists of a blunt, explosive statement designed to surprise or jolt the reader.	The president is dead. Friday the 13th is over, but the casualty list is still growing.
QUESTION:	The question lead features a pertinent query that arouses the readers' curiosity and makes them want to read the body of the story for answers. Phrase this lead as a rhetorical question (a question that cannot be answered with a straight "yes" or "no").	How does pay in the Navy compare with civilian wages? Has the space age affected the role of the Navy?
QUOTATION:	The quotation lead features a short, eye-catching quote or remark, usually set in quotation marks. A quote lead should be used only when it is so important or remarkable that it overshadows the other facts in the story.	"You really don't know what freedom is until you have had to escape from Communist captivity," says Bob Dengler, a former Navy lieutenant and an escapee from a Viet Cong prison camp.
DIRECT ADDRESS	The direct address lead is aimed directly at the readers and makes them collaborators with facts in the story. It usually employs the pronouns "you" and "your."	Your pay will increase by 10 percent next month. You can receive a college education at Navy expense if you qualify under a new program announced this week.

Figure 2-7.—Sample novelty leads.

Feature and Novelty Leads

Although the summary lead is the simplest, safest and strongest of all leads used in straight newswriting, most media like to add a little variety when leading into a story. Feature leads are a vital part of newspaper writing. The feature lead permits you to take a mundane straight news piece and transform it into a story that captures the interest and empathy of the readers.

Novelty leads differ from summary leads in that they make no attempt to answer all of the five Ws and the H. As the name implies, novelty leads are novel. They use different writing approaches to present different news situations to attract the reader's attention and arouse curiosity.

Feature leads must fit the mood of the story. If you intend to set a particular mood or point of view in a story, your intent or tone should be set at the beginning of the story.

If the situation presents itself in which a novelty lead would be appropriate, by all means use it. Do not get into the habit, however, of trying to write a novelty lead for every story, because they are not always adaptable to every situation. It is easy for the unusual to become commonplace if it is seen or heard too often. Novelty leads lose their effect if they are overused.

Figure 2-7 presents various examples of novelty leads most commonly used in newswriting. Although the eight types described are the ones most commonly used, it is a mistake for you to assume that all news leads may be categorized by type or classification. Their names are not important anyway. To the JO, the ability to write is more important than the ability to categorize.

Identity and Authority

There are two other considerations to keep in mind when you are preparing news leads — **identity** and **authority.** In most local stories, especially homeowners, it is necessary to identify persons frilly in the lead.

For example, suppose you prepared a hometown story on a sailor who formerly resided in Louisville, Ky. Not being very experienced, you turn in a lead like the following:

> "Navy Seaman Eugene M. Brainer reported for duty Feb. 16 aboard the guided-missile cruiser USS *Hinkle,* now operating in Western Pacific waters."

Although you have answered all the Ws and H except why and how (in this case unnecessary), your lead is still incomplete. The story is meaningless until you identify Brainer as being from Louisville. Even then, an editor of a Louisville newspaper will want a local angle on the sailor. The only angle available to you is the name of Brainer's parents and their home address.

You must, therefore, identify Brainer more fully in your lead. It is unlikely that many of the newspaper's readers would know him merely by name, and a city the size of Louisville might have more than one Eugene M. Brainer. To localize the story and to avoid confusion or misinterpretation, you would include more identification. The lead should be written in the following way:

> "A Kentucky native, Seaman Eugene M. Brainer, son of Mr. and Mrs. Mack Brainer of 70 N. Williams St., Louisville, reported for duty Feb. 16 aboard the guided-missile cruiser USS *Hinkle,* a unit of the Navy's Seventh Fleet in the Pacific"

As you can see, complete identification of a person in the lead sometimes makes that lead long and cumbersome. Yet, it cannot be avoided in hometown stories where identity is more important than the action, especially if the action is weak, as it is in the preceding example.

In many instances, however, full identification is unnecessary or impractical for inclusion in the lead. In general, complete lead identification is unnecessary and should be avoided when one or more of the following points is true:

- The action overshadows the person or persons involved.
- There are too many persons involved to identify all of them by name and rate.
- 'The identification does not mean much to the readers in a particular area.
- The "who" is a prominent, widely known figure.

When an individual is not fully identified in the lead, that person must be identified by name, rank or rating, title, duty station and possibly hometown address elsewhere in the story. This identification is also important for places and things in a story. If you use the name of an unfamiliar town or city in a story, at least identify it by the state in which it is located. If you use

the name of a ship or an airplane, give its type or classification.

Impersonal identification maybe used in the lead when the news subject consists of several persons unfimiliar to the reader, such as groups or organizations. Nonspecific whats, wheres and whens may also be used depending on the news circumstances.

Authority is the source from which quotes and information originate in a story. Like identity, it should be used in the lead only when necessary. Never use authority in a story when the source of information is clearly implied.

The following is an example of a lead in which authority is necessary:

> Longer tours, fewer, shorter and less expensive moves can all be expected by Navy people for the rest of this fiscal year, according to Vice Adm. David Bagley, Chief of Naval Personnel.

Attributing this statement to the Chief of Naval Personnel gives it authority, because the admiral is in a position to know and speak about such matters.

Contrary to popular belief, people do not believe "everything" they read in newspapers. Many of them, as a matter of fact, challenge any statement that conflicts with their preconceived opinions. Using authority in a story helps you overcome this natural skepticism. Sometimes people will believe certain facts more readily if they know or respect the person to whom they are attributed.

What follows are two simple rules governing the use of authority in a news story:

- Use it when it appears that the reader may challenge a statement.
- Use it when the name of the authority lends support or emphasis to the facts.

In the Navy, the authority for many statements is frequently implied. If a story obviously deals with Navy ships, Navy personnel or Navy equipment, it is often unnecessary to use "The Navy announced today" or similar expressions. If a newspaper editor feels a statement must be attributed to the Navy, the editor will insert the authoritative source. It is a bad practice for this phrase to be inserted in every story merely for the sake of using it or just to get the word "Navy" into the story. It is also particularly bad for every news release to be attributed to the captain or admiral by name, especially when the subject of the story is remote from his immediate interest.

For a wrap-up on preparing the lead, you should keep the following four objectives in mind:

- Present a summary of the story
- Identify persons and places involved
- Stress the news peg
- Stimulate the reader to continue reading the story

THE BRIDGE

Assuming you have written the lead for a story, what do you do next? In some stories, you will find the transition from the lead to the body of the story is a bit awkward. To smooth this transition, you use a writing device known as a **bridge.**

A bridge is a connecting sentence or paragraph between the lead and the body of the story. Although it is not always required, it can serve several useful purposes. For instance, in the bridge, you can place facts that are too detailed for the lead and too important to be placed lower in the story. Note the following example:

> Novelty Lead: For sale: One guided missile destroyer.
>
> Bridge: The Navy is thinking about inserting this advertisement in the nation's newspapers. The guided missile destroyer USS *Benjamin Stoddert,* which is no longer fit for active service, will be scrapped next month.

Note that the writer used a freak lead to introduce his story. The entire lead consists of only six words, and the effect is good. The lead obviously would not be as effective if all the facts were presented in the first paragraph.

Abridge also can bring the reader up to date on past and present events related to the story by the use of **tie-backs** and **tie-ins.**

Tie-Back

A tie-back is a newswriting device that allows you to refresh the reader's memory about past events related to the story being written. It frequently is used in follow-up stories (see Chapter 5). Consider the example that follows:

> **Lead:** The U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker *Northwind, with the* help of U.S. icebreakers *Glacier, Staten Island* and the Canadian icebreaker

MacDonald is free from the arctic ice pack that threatened to maroon it until next summer.

Bridge (used as a tie-back): *Northwind* was making the trip back from an attempt to resupply the research station ice-island T-3 when it began experiencing difficulties in the polar ice. The ice was so severe the ship lost a blade on its starboard propeller and cracked its hull.

Body: The relief ships punched their way through. . . .

Tie-In

A tie-in is similar to a tie-back, except it provides information concerning other events that are currently taking place and that supplement the story being written. While the tie-back deals with the past, the tie-in deals with present events. Consider the following example:

Lead: Navy doctors are investigating an outbreak of 17 cases of scarlet fever aboard the destroyer USS *Balast,* a Norfolk-based ship operating in the Mediterranean.

Bridge (used as a tie-in): Meanwhile, measures are being taken to prevent further outbreaks of the disease on other Navy ships. Navy personnel have been warned to report to shipboard sick bays immediately if they find themselves suffering from fever, sore throat or rashes on the neck and upper chest.

Body: The first case of scarlet fever was reported aboard the *Balast* April 27, about three weeks after the ship left Norfolk. Doctors said . . .

The tie-in can explain or elaborate on one or more of the summary facts, usually why or how. In writing a summary lead, you may find that it becomes long and unwieldy if you try to include a detailed explanation of why and how. But if the explanation is important enough, instead of withholding it until the body of the story, present it in the bridge as in the example that follows:

Summary Lead: The Navy will begin replacing its time-tested manila lines July 1 with a synthetic product of modern progress — nylon rope.

Bridge (explaining "why"): After months of study and experimentation, the Ships Systems Command has found that nylon rope is superior to manila line in strength, durability and elasticity.

If you have to include the information from these two sentences in your lead, it would become unnecessarily long and cumbersome. By explaining the why in the bridge, you present the information more clearly and make the story more readable. It can provide continuity and a smooth transition from the lead to the body of the story by bringing in one or more secondary, but significant, facts. Note the following example:

Lead: From now on, all of the accounting for the Navy's vast network of ship's stores will go untouched by human hands.

Bridge: CompuNav, an electronic data processing system, will do the job — and do it cheaper too.

Body: The CompuNav file computer was unveiled today. . . .

The bridge in this story is strictly a transitional device that helps close the gap between the lead and the body of the story. Reread these sentences again. Note how awkward the story would be if the bridge were omitted.

THE BODY

For you to produce a smooth, final story, the lead and body must coincide. The body is the detailed portion of a news story that develops and explains the facts outlined in the lead (and in the bridge, if there is a bridge). Here again, the importance of a neatly tailored lead cannot be overemphasized. A cumbersome lead is most often followed by a cumbersome body. But when a lead has done its job, it will usually provide an outline for the orderly organization of facts in the body of the story.

To some extent the organization of the body is dictated by the material itself —if it is a series of events, for instance. So the writer has to write an orderly, well-organized story and at the same time keep in mind the relative importance of various details.

Guided by the idea of news importance, the writer proceeds through the story by selecting the next most

SUMMARY LEAD	EGLIN AFB, FLA (NNS) — A Navy officer who had never before taken control of an aircraft brought an Air Force spotter plane in for a rough but successful landing recently.
FACT 1 (bridge)	The incident came about after the pilot died of a heart attack during a routine training mission over the Gulf of Mexico.
FACT 2	Lt. John G. Graf, USN, of Aurora, Ill., walked away from the emergency landing only "slightly shaken up." The incident occurred in an area 60 miles southwest of Eglin Air Force Base.
FACT 3	Graf took control of the single-engine plane and returned the aircraft to Eglin.
FACT 4	Presently assigned to Eglin as a Navy liaison officer, Graf reported to his present duty station last July.
FACT 5	A former enlisted man, the 39-year-old officer served as an aerial photographer for several years and his general familiarity with aircraft is credited with helping him land the plane.

Figure 2-8.—Diagram of a straight news story.

important incident, fact or detail, then the next important, and soon, until reaching the least important of all. At this point, the writer has reached the apex of the inverted pyramid with material of least value. The writer now knows that the makeup editor can slice one, two or three paragraphs from the bottom of his story without depriving the reader of the story's chief news elements. Figure 2-8 shows a diagram of a straight news story structure.

A FINAL THOUGHT

For several years, there has been a trend among civilian newspapers toward greater informality in news presentation. This trend has become known as "talking a story onto paper."

Several years ago, an observant editor noticed that a reporter would come to the city desk and describe a story he has covered. The story would sound attractive as he talked. Then the same writer would go to his desk and write the piece, pouring facts into the established newswriting mold. What had been interesting when he related it verbally then sounded like every other story that had appeared before — only the names and places were changed.

Recognizing the value of the reporter's conversational report of the story, the editor thereafter encouraged his writers to use a more conversational tone, coupled with simple language, in all their copy.

The main purpose of any news story is to **communicate the facts.** To accomplish this communication, the story must be read. When an informal story presented in simple, everyday language can accomplish this purpose, use it without hesitation.